

	<i>United Nations Women's Guild of Rome</i>	<i>Mail: c/o FAO Mail Room V.le Terme di Caracalla 00153 Rome, Italy</i>	<i>Office : B-050 Bis Phone : 06 5705-3628 e-mail : unwg@fao.org</i>
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Rome

June 21st 2015

Dear Sir,

We are writing on behalf of the United Nations Women's Guild of Rome to share with you some concerns of UN families regarding the UN Common System Compensation Package Review.

Our letter was originally addressed to FICSA and the FICSA representatives working together with you on this complex and highly technical operation which will impact significantly on the lives of all UN staff and their families. Some notes and queries with a focus on the education allowance and the Rome duty station were attached.

We have now decided to share this letter also with you and your colleagues of the International Civil Servants Commission.

Our comments are not the technical comments of experts or specialists; we are writing as members of UN families, spouses and parents. We discuss the professional allowances and the draft proposals in terms of what they mean to our expatriate families in the UN system, particularly to our children.

Compensation of the expatriate employee impacts many more people than the staff member alone and his nuclear family. A staff member from a developing country would typically support many members of his extended family at home with his compensation package. The UNWG wishes the ICSC to see the person behind the job, and the family behind that person. In the case of developing country employees, that family could be very large and any reduction in the compensation package could have a significant ripple effect, bringing hardship to dozens of people.

In some UN member countries, government working groups and expert committees making recommendations for new legislation are now including at least one representative of the people whose lives will be most affected by that legislation. For example, specialist committees working on health care acts will include at least one patient representative.

Please view our communication in that light.

We hope that you will be able to find some time to consider our observations and our concerns and we thank you for your kind attention.

Correspondence may be addressed to Shonagh Mc Aulay, Family Committee, UNWG Rome, email shonagh.mc.aulay@oxfordalumni.org , shonaghathome@gmail.com , and to Mariza Jurgens, President UNWG Rome at jurgensmariza@gmail.com

Kind regards,

Shonagh Mc Aulay (Board Member, UNWG Rome)



Mariza Jurgens (President, UNWG Rome)



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Rome,

June 8th 2015

Dear Diab,

First, we'd like to express our sincere appreciation to you and all the staff representatives for what you do to protect the interests and the rights of staff members and their families. We wish you a constructive and productive session of negotiations.

UNWG Rome particularly thanks FICSA for your work on the ICSC draft proposals for professional allowances.

We have also noted that UN Globe is representing diverse family issues very effectively, using human rights arguments and calling for ethical coherence within the UN system - walking the walk - and we applaud that.

The UN common system compensation package review is a complex and highly technical operation; we cannot comment on the specialist technical aspects of your work with the ICSC. But we are UN families and from that pragmatic angle we would like to share some observations on the perceived potential impact of the draft proposals for professional allowances.* We see many of the proposals as gravely detrimental to the welfare of families and suggest that they will do little to enhance the future appeal of the UN as an employer.

UNWG has a history of involvement with UN families dating back to before 1948. In 1948 our association in New York was honoured by the UN administration of the time with an authorization to use the new UN logo in our title. We are proud of this enduring relationship with the UN and with the many agencies that have so kindly hosted us for close to seventy years, not only in New York, but in Rome, in Geneva, in Vienna and in many other duty stations. In those days, while Eleanor Roosevelt was chairing the drafting committee for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, our group of UN wives was knitting warm sweaters and packing shipments of clothing for destitute children in post-war Europe. Such volunteering and fundraising work remains a core element of our identity. We are passionate and successful fundraisers for women, children, vulnerable communities worldwide. Wherever we are, we also create community and social context for UN families. We see this as giving back: we welcome newcomers, we offer practical assistance to our UN families, we involve staff and family members in our fundraising, social and cultural events. Last but not least, with our charitable and cultural events in the local community we present to the outside world a very positive image of the UN as a whole. Increasingly, however, we also find ourselves advocating for the rights and interests of UN spouses and families, and we see a place for this too. Eleanor Roosevelt herself once made some down to earth, practical remarks on the importance of upholding human rights where we are, close to home. "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."

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- * Please find attached (Annex 1) some further background material related mainly to the education allowance draft proposals as perceived at the Rome duty station.
 - * Correspondence should be addressed to shonagh.mc.aulay@oxfordalumni.org; jurgensmariza@gmail.com; shonaghatome@gmail.com
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Please remind the delegates of the Fifth Committee that they are making decisions that profoundly affect the lives of families and their children. Given the stated ICSC position on UN families, it might be appropriate to remind the Commission of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Article 16.3: *The family is the fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.* Article 10 of the International Covenant on Human Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976) goes further, exhorting parties to accord to families *the widest possible protection and assistance.*

This principle is enshrined and further elaborated and codified in the constitutions and in the domestic family legislation of many UN member countries. National legislation inspired by human rights principles underpins social policies at home and ensures parity of social protection for the families of civil servants, diplomats and military personnel serving their countries overseas.

Norms and standards for social protection prevailing in the home country represent the benchmark for assessment of appropriate expatriate allowances and services. Member states have also steadily strengthened the status and protections of women and children and acknowledge duties towards families that go far beyond what was contemplated in the immediate post war years when the UN was founded. The UN has not kept pace.

Member countries remain involved with the welfare of their families serving overseas; the UN is an international organization that enters into a contractual relationship with the staff member alone. The distinction is clear to us. The fact is, however, that the package of professional allowances represents a form of proxy for an array of social rights and protections forfeited by UN families when they leave their home countries and join the International Civil Service, remaining in the UN system sometimes throughout their entire working lives. We appeal to the ICSC and to the member countries to bear this reality in mind and the responsibility that comes with it.

During the 68th FICSA Council in Rome, Mr. Kingston Rhodes made a frank statement to the effect that the personal choices made by UN staff members regarding their families and life styles were their personal choices and thus not a primary concern of the UN organizations, which today must rather focus on paying for the job done. The philosophy driving the compensation package review accordingly prioritizes the need to attract and retain the high-performing individual candidate (HLCM Strategic Plan 2013 – 2016).

We appreciate the strategic value and impact of these disconcerting statements, particularly in times of crisis and budgetary constraint when the UN is being asked to do more with less. However, UNWG Rome firmly opposes the position adopted by the ICSC together with this view of the UN family as an optional add-on and a personal choice.

We suggest that a more realistic and less ideological perspective would take into account the fact that the talented individual candidate will frequently come with family attached, and that a more holistic, humane, human rights aware approach to this reality will ultimately benefit the International Civil Service and the work of the UN community.

The profile of today's high-performing candidate currently tends to include an equally high-performing partner, a phenomenon so commonplace nowadays that it is recognized in some member countries as a factor exacerbating social inequality. (Inequality: What Can Be Done? Sir Anthony Atkinson, Harvard University Press, 2015).

Moreover, according to the Economist (May 30th, 2015), while the institution of marriage may be in decline in some countries among certain social groups, reported levels of marital satisfaction and happiness among the professional class are back to around 73%, a level last seen in 1970, and 23% of married women with children in the US are now out-earning their husbands, up from 4% in 1960.

We therefore see no contradiction between attracting and retaining competent staff and constructing and maintaining family friendly policies.

If the UN Common System Compensation Package were extraordinarily lavish or came close to what is provided by other multilateral or intergovernmental agencies and member country foreign services, this ICSC position could be considered. UN families would in this scenario have a range of family options and high end life-style choices at their disposition and might reasonably be requested to assume more responsibility for those choices.

This is not the reality. UN families are indeed making personal choices every day, choices to keep families together and to support the UN spouse in work which they are proud to identify with. However, those choices could often be better described as

sacrifices. Our families are not making life-style choices, choosing between one privilege and another, as the ICSC position implies. They are making existential decisions.

If draft proposals such as the proposed revision of the education allowance should be implemented in their present form, we believe that these decisions may become very stark indeed. The life style of UN families is generally quite modest and it will not be easy to find the sums that are emerging in these present proposals. It is not a question of cutting superfluous expenditure or conspicuous consumption. It is a question of finding the money.

All the families we know prioritize excellent education for their children. Without the education allowance at its present level, we are told by many that they would not have considered a UN posting. If these proposals are implemented, we think that some parents may consider returning to their home countries to give their children wider educational options and a better chance. Some staff members will doubtless consider whether they should follow their families and either seek alternative employment or become home country based consultants for their former UN employers.

The purpose of the education allowance and its intention is not to provide UN staff members with élite privileges for their children. Privileges can be eliminated. Rights cannot. This is stating the obvious, but we are doing so because we see the rights of the UN child at risk.

The UNWG understands that the purpose of the education allowance is to guarantee certain education rights to the UN expatriate child.

Firstly, the allowance is an education allowance, and this was surely the intention of the UN administrations which called this allowance into being. There is a difference between education and tuition, as Mr Patanjali Dev Nayar pointed out during the FICSA Council 2015. This is not a merely semantic issue but a legal question. What is guaranteed to the child by a state is generally defined in law as education, not tuition. The Secretary of State of one member country, for instance, together with local education authorities, has a duty to put in place, and follow, an education curriculum that is balanced and broad and 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of the pupils at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'. The core subjects of the four key stages of education include not only the core academic subjects but also several subjects which in international schools are frequently placed in the optional extras programme, if they are available at all: design and technology, art and design, music, citizenship, physical education, sport and swimming, theatre studies, etc. All this is education, and not tuition, and this is what state schooling offers in that country.

Further, the child's right to *appropriate* education is anchored in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. UN expatriate families must be enabled to provide their children with the education that is appropriate for that child in the child's own language. Appropriate education must support continuity and the stable development of the child regardless of the geographical mobility of the staff member parent. Education must meet the individual needs of the individual child. The child may require specialist support (special needs education) in order to access the curriculum, which is his legal and constitutional right in many member countries with advanced disability rights legislation. International schools are rarely in a position to offer excellent or even adequate SEN services. We hope that the ICSC is aware of the dimensions of these issues and informed of the legislative and educational advances made in some member countries to ensure equality of opportunity for children with disabilities.

Some children may be high achievers who require fast track education programmes to fulfill their potential; a musical child may require a placement in a specialist school; some might be disengaged academically but brilliant mechanics or IT experts who should be placed in vocational programmes; and here again international schools can rarely cater to their requirements. Education must eventually permit the UN child's full integration as an adult into the family's home country, sometimes after many years of mobility, since, unlike foreign service staff, the families of international civil servants do not alternate postings overseas and in their home countries.

Fulfilling all these obligations towards the UN child is by no means a simple matter for the expatriate UN family in most duty stations, even with the education allowance at its present level and even with a boarding allowance which still partly enables expatriate families to consider stable and appropriate educational options in the child's home country. In Rome, for instance, a city with several international schools, many expatriate families will struggle to find appropriate educational provision for children with diverse disabilities and SEN needs, but also for some children with the diverse abilities mentioned above. In general, the quality of education available at the various duty stations worldwide and the capacities of independent international

schools are highly variable, and this complex issue warrants detailed study if families in some duty stations are not to be unduly penalized. Eliminating boarding expenses from the education allowance or operating drastic cuts has major implications for many UN children and families.

Parents of children with disabilities are particularly concerned that options should not be further restricted. Boarding is in many cases, even in the home countries, the option of choice and sometimes the only option for these children. We note, for instance, in ICSC / 80 / CRP.8 that the maximum allowable special education grant currently under discussion could be lower than that currently in effect in Switzerland, the UK, the USD inside USA. It is generally accepted that the disability rights legislation and the advanced SEN educational provision of these three named countries represent a benchmark of excellence and that they are setting standards for other countries in these fields. Our association is therefore most concerned to learn that these standards of provision may in future no longer be available to the UN child with disabilities. We were also concerned to note in February 2014 at the FICSA Council that the question of the disability education allowance had at that stage in proceedings apparently not been taken into consideration by the ICSC. The disability education allowance, presently expressed as a percentage of the maximum education allowance, will also presumably be impacted by the proposed changes to the education allowance. We invite the ICSC to reflect on the right to *appropriate* education anchored in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to consider the many UN declarations on the rights of children and adults with disabilities, and above all we appeal to them to review examples of best practice in the member countries cited above as a basis for their decisions regarding the special education allowance.

We also invite the delegates of the member countries on the UN Fifth Committee to contrast and compare the educational allowances available to their own foreign service children with those afforded to children of UN families. Many of our members across the world are spouses of diplomatic representatives to the UN agencies. Our anecdotal evidence suggests that as a rule the member countries' provision for education of foreign service children is far more generous than that of the UN for UN children and young people. We believe that member countries will be reluctant to vote for measures which will further disadvantage the children of international civil servants in comparison with the children of foreign service representatives to the UN.

Mindful of the real world needs of expatriate families and children, we can only recommend that the UN education allowance should be realistically benchmarked. Our view is that the education allowance should reflect prevailing best practice among member countries providing for children of expatriate staff overseas. We think that standards of social protection in general for international civil servant families should reflect best practice among the UN member countries for their civil servants overseas. Comparative studies of such issues are warranted, in our opinion. Additionally, in connection with this education allowance recommendation, we would like to enquire which reviews and reforms of administrative processing of education allowance claims are under consideration, since we understand that processing costs are at present excessive.

Regarding the proposed single salary scale and the spousal and dependency allowances, it is evident that real decreases in compensation are entailed for married staff and for single parents. We see in this a general downgrading of the principle of social protection due to families. We appeal to the ICSC and to the delegates of the member countries to bear in mind this universal principle of solidarity.

We are particularly preoccupied to see that the proposed modifications to the salary scale may disproportionately penalize single parents. We know that the majority of single parents are women. In our view, disadvantage of expatriate working mothers and their children represents a form of disparate impact discrimination and should be avoided. The UN stands in the eye of the world for the advancement of women. All UN operational fields have been transformed in recent years by awareness of gender issues and various measures have been enacted to advance the equality and protection of women worldwide. We trust that budgetary compromises may be found that do not target single working mothers.

Regarding married couples and the spousal allowance, we would like to point out the wider implications today of the loss of the second professional income. Spouses must generally leave their own career tracks if they wish to accompany the UN staff member to international postings. (Many unemployed UNWG Rome members dedicate their time to volunteering for our projects and for disaster relief initiatives; we are most grateful to FAO for a generous hosting agreement and to WFP and to IFAD for kindly welcoming our fundraising events.) The obstacles to employment are well known and range from work permits to cross-border recognition of professional qualifications to language skills. Unlike the first UN wives, women today generally do not expect or wish to leave their professions on marriage in order to devote themselves to the welfare of their families and communities. For men, the challenge may in different ways be even greater. While we respect the choices of the women and men who do decide to serve families and communities without financial reward, we all know today that this no longer represents the

norm. We all know that the decision to renounce financial independence severely limits the family's economic capacity. We also know that women who do so are putting themselves at high risk of future poverty and that many older divorced women are economically disadvantaged. More marriages break down today than when the newly founded UN was formulating its responsibilities and its policies regarding international civil servants and their expatriate families.

This is stating the obvious. Our association is spelling it out because we wish to underscore that it is considered unusual today and even ill-advised for women to make the choices that must be made by most UN spouses in 2015 if they wish to keep their families together in the same place. These difficult choices make them, and their children, objectively vulnerable. We are therefore motivated to describe such choices as sacrifices.

This is the wider social context in which the relevance of the spousal allowances should be considered. Cuts to spousal allowances, education allowances and other expatriate family benefits send a strong deterrent message to families considering an expatriate career in the UN. The material importance of these benefits to expatriate families should not be underestimated.

Foreign services of member countries have responded to social change and to the dwindling appeal of the single-earner expatriate career for today's dual earning couples not only with higher family allowances but with upgrading and updating of the old expatriate benefit models. Pro-active family friendly measures in the form of family liaison or welfare services are common, as is assistance with employment. The mode of delivery of benefits in many foreign services has also been reformed, taking into account the equal status of women and men in today's families and ensuring equal access, as in the home countries, to fundamental services. Some member countries provide full information for spouses on all salary and compensation matters, requiring their signature as confirmation that they are informed of all family benefits at their disposal. Some member countries require the family benefits to be paid into a separate bank account in the name of the spouse. Anecdotal information at our disposal suggests that such protective measures for spouses and children are by no means a prerogative of rich country foreign services; low-income countries also adopt this approach to social protection of the spouse. Not one of these protections is available to the UN expatriate spouse and her or his children.

In short, the proposed cuts to UN spousal and other expatriate benefits can be perceived as elements in a larger somewhat anachronistic picture which holds less appeal for couples and families than it did in the 1940s. The expatriate family in the UN system is already subject to multiple and unusual stresses and strains. We see an urgent need for the institution of forms of gender aware social protection for UN families and our association is advocating for this in Rome. Small changes to the mode of delivery of the compensation package, small steps such as family liaison facilities - commonplace since the 60s and 70s of the last century in member countries' diplomatic and military services overseas - would go a long way towards enhancing the social protection and general welfare of all families.

The trend towards disadvantage of families, primarily children and women, that is emerging from the Common System Compensation Package Review is causing us grave concern. We believe that the UN family at this time is still very motivated to make real sacrifices, both financial and personal, to enable the career of the international civil servant. There is a widely shared perception of loyalty and ethical commitment. In ICSC/80/R4 point 23 we find the following observation of the working group, discussing incentives and bonus schemes: it was stressed that *people worked for the United Nations for its prestige and to contribute to the greater good* and that this intrinsic motivation should not be undermined by the possibility of additional financial incentives. Further financial stress, however, in our view, may induce many UN families and potential UN candidates to reconsider their employment options and choose life situations which enable the personal and financial independence and the professional development of both spouses and which permit access to high quality public or independent education for their children.

We are deeply grateful to the UN organizations that host us in Rome and elsewhere. In Rome, we know that we can count on generosity of the institutions and the good will of many individuals towards our association and our members. We particularly appreciate the approachability of senior management in Rome and the readiness they have shown to engage with us on many issues. We also warmly acknowledge advances such as the recently inaugurated child day care centre at FAO and in a different context the Secretary General's courageous human rights based recognition of LGBT families in the UN system. However, UNWG Rome does not perceive the UN as an overall family friendly employer.

Under the present circumstances, we suggest that an increment of economic pressure on families with slashed education allowances, reduced spousal and hardship allowances, reduced expatriate allowances across the board, could further detract from the diminishing appeal of an expatriate career in the UN.

Conversely, we suggest that pro-active, explicitly family friendly measures would exponentially enhance the UN's potential as an attractive expatriate employer for high-performing candidates today and particularly for women.

Kind regards,

Shonagh Mc Aulay (Executive Board Member, UNWG Rome)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shonagh Mc Aulay', written in a cursive style.

Mariza Jurgens (President, UNWG Rome)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mariza Jurgens', written in a cursive style.

Annex 1

UNWG Rome notes, queries

March 21st 2015

General, education allowance and the expatriate family

The proposed changes to the education allowance are not family friendly and, if implemented, are likely to impact very negatively on UN families.

There are considerable sums involved for most families. Many if not most UN families are already dealing with the consequences of doing without one spouse's professional income in order to keep the family geographically together. The present perception of many members is that the UN salary and allowances do not balance out that loss in economic terms. If families are in future required to find sums they can afford only with difficulty so that their children may continue to access schooling in their own language, the cumulative sacrifice involved may become unsustainable for some.

Most families recognize and deal pragmatically with the fact that 'a large proportion of any international staff is required to incur additional expense and to make certain sacrifices by living away from their own country.' (1949, Committee of Experts on Salary, Allowance and Leave Systems). This is so today as it was in 1949. UN expatriate families are proud of the work of the UN staff member. But if those sacrifices come to be seen as detrimental to family welfare and above all if children are negatively impacted, people may eventually plan and choose differently.

We surmise that some spouses may in future opt for geographical separation, as military spouses do, and some talented applicants may in consequence commit to the International Civil Service on a limited basis.

We understand that the UN Common System Compensation Review was undertaken not primarily as a cost-cutting exercise but in order to update, streamline and render more competitive the conditions of service of International Civil Servants.

We see a real and perplexing disconnect between the realities of life for families in the UN system and the first stated aim of the CEB 2015 Fit for purpose Strategy: 1) Attracting and retaining talent.

Mobility of UN staff members and the expatriate child's right to personal stability, educational continuity, reintegration into the home country:

At a time when UN staff members are increasingly required to embrace mobility, boarding coverage should remain part of the compensation package.

Foreign service careers alternate postings in other countries and posting at the HQ in the home country, allowing families to touch base regularly and maintain links with the home culture, family and friends.

UN families do not have such options. International civil servants are not posted home on alternate postings but remain in foreign postings for the duration of their careers.

The delegates of the Fifth Committee may find it interesting to compare and contrast their own national conditions of service overseas and their children's education allowances and other expatriate allowances with those being proposed to UN expatriate staff.

Headquarters cities may offer more amenities than field posts, but they remain foreign postings for the staff member and the UN family, however pleasant. They cannot be compared with or treated as home country postings. Real world distinctions between locations and cultures remain and they are concrete and challenging for families.

The UN may in some senses represent a parallel universe in which local and national contradictions are superseded and everything is contemplated from a global perspective, but we are not bringing up our children there. The children of the UN staff member are living in a world where these distinctions still count, and in most cases, unless the spouse finds UN employment, the same is true for the spouse.

The children of the staff member remain orientated towards the home country, they are schooled in that country's language and culture and, critically, they acquire qualifications for adult life that will be recognized in the home country. Our children embrace diversity and many cultures but they will one day be required to reintegrate and construct their adult futures in the home country. This is the everyday reality of our families.

In recognition of these facts, the education allowance was called into being, together with other expatriate allowances.

The draft education allowance proposals, if implemented, mean that UN families who wish to do so will no longer be able to provide their children with a stable educational experience in their own countries. They will no longer in a position to guarantee the reintegration of their children in the home country.

For many families this is a critical concern.

Even if schooling is available at duty stations, children generally suffer if they must change schools and locations frequently. It is well established that children do better socially, personally and academically in a stable environment. Boarding schools have always offered solutions for mobile or expatriate families or for families living in remote areas.

Many foreign service families who elect to have their children in boarding schools in the home country arrange for them to stay at school even during the home country posting of the family, in order to guarantee this fundamental stability and continuity.

Query: UNWG would like to know what measures are being considered for children whose parents receive a HQ posting after some years of field stations and boarding school entitlement. Moving children between schools represents undue hardship to the children involved with probable impact on their educational achievement and future chances.

Diversity and the right to make educational choices for the expatriate child which will permit his or her re-integration into the home culture and community:

Boarding in many countries, cultures and communities is the option of choice, and particularly so in expatriate communities such as the foreign diplomatic services and the military. **In our view, respecting diversity of UN staff members means also respecting diverse cultural and social norms regarding schooling.**

The education allowance, in its present form and within its present limitations, respects diversity of cultural and social norms of UN families and enables expatriate families to choose the type of education that is right for each particular child and best guarantees their personal stability, educational continuity and fitness to reintegrate and make their adult lives in the home country.

The proposals under discussion are not simply restrictive in economic terms but represent a major intervention in the lives of UN expatriate families. They are also ultimately highly prescriptive in their effects, since without the boarding option educational choices of most UN families will be limited to a small number of high-priced international schools of varying quality at duty stations.

A staff member made the point that in many countries, boarding outside the city is traditionally the reasonable and most economical choice for families. Eliminating boarding coverage in the education allowance would in such situations lead to higher costs.

Extreme traffic conditions in some cities, and the logistic difficulties of conveying the child across the city to a day school may motivate some families to prefer boarding.

In some locations, parents who have little time available for family during the week settle their children in weekday boarding schools and bring them home at weekends.

There can be many reasons for preferring boarding, both personal and cultural. Some families may have a family tradition of attending a particular school. Religious reasons may play a role: families might perhaps specifically look for Quaker schooling or Jesuit schooling; some families for religious reasons or respecting custom might prefer their girls to attend single sex schools. Some families believe that academic achievement is higher in single sex schools. Some families may have a strong military tradition and wish their children to attend schools with a trainee officer corps. Some families may judge that the child will adapt better into university later if they live for some time in the home country during their schooling. The family on overseas postings till retirement may prefer to settle the child close to relatives in the home country. The child may be a bad fit in the local international school or in the local culture; the child may be homesick for the country of origin, for friends and family.

Boarding and tertiary institutions

We are informed that boarding cannot be included for tertiary institutions since families in the home countries would anyway be sending their children away from home to study.

UNWG would like to point out that today this is not necessarily the case.

For financial reasons, increasing numbers of young students in some countries are now opting for colleges close to their family homes, even in countries that have a tradition of sending students away from home for college and university.

Families and students alike are concerned about mounting levels of student debt. In consequence the student may decide to remain in the family home while attending university.

This cost-cutting solution is not available to the mobile UN family. We think that boarding costs should be covered if necessary, and up to the ceiling available for secondary education.

UN-wide boarding expenses: Query: What percentage of UN families worldwide chooses boarding and for how many years? Are significant numbers involved? What exactly are the arguments underpinning the proposal that boarding options should be eliminated?

Provision for special educational needs

Parents of students with disabilities remain concerned and uncertain about the implications of the present review regarding special education. It appears that the maximum allowable grant for special education could be lower than that currently in effect for Switzerland, the UK, the USD inside USA. (ICSC/80/CRP.8). Real costs of provision are rising, so this is extremely worrying.

Over and above the issues raised in the present draft proposals, there are grave concerns about the way the present education allowance is dealt with by administrations and whether the protection and the rights of the disabled child in the UN system are aligned with national rights in the countries with most advanced disability rights legislation, or not.

UNWG would welcome an opportunity for further clarification and discussion of this and other technical points

One example among many: assistive technology. How is assistive technology funded in the UN system for children who require such supports in daily life and in educational settings in order to fulfil his or her potential or in order to access the curriculum? Is the health care provider responsible for funding or are these expenses categorized as educationally incurred and therefore reimbursable by the education allowance? What is the situation regarding therapeutic provision integrated into the IEP and on site at certain special education schools?

More generally, how should the right of the disabled child to appropriate support be technically supported and guaranteed if funding for appropriate special needs provision cannot be agreed upon with management or if staff members for whatever reason do not meet their parental obligations towards that child with disabilities? The expatriate UN child with disabilities has no recourse to the national authorities and jurisdictions that are available for the child's protection in many UN member countries. In some member countries special needs tribunals have been instituted to defend the interests of the child and his or her access to appropriate special education in cases where state provision may be held to be inadequate. We see a deficit of protection towards expatriate children in the UN system and we are aware of cases where the interests of expatriate UN children with disabilities have not been adequately protected, with most serious consequences for the children involved.

UN administrations should be informed about today's standards of disability legislation and the rights to education of children with disabilities, including detailed information on standards of special education provision in countries with excellent levels of provision and best practice coherent with the many UN declarations on the rights of the child and the rights of the disabled person. **These should be the standards of provision for children with disabilities in UN families and education allowance ceilings should reflect these realities rather than being based on percentages of an otherwise determined education allowance.**

These are very serious questions and we hope that opportunities may be found to discuss them, within the framework of the present compensation package review and beyond. UNWG is aware of grave shortcomings in the present system.

Sliding Scale and education allowance

The sliding scale system proposed may “disincentivise staff from taking higher cost options, if possible”. In Rome we see that all international schools are charging at roughly similar rates. The only economical alternatives are Italian state schools. So the disincentive is irrelevant in Rome and will result in no economies.

The disincentive notion suggests that the UN education allowance represents privilege rather than access to existentially necessary services for children of the mobile UN family. Please note related comments in our letters to you (16/03/2015 and 08/06/2015).

Acquired rights

Query: are expatriation allowances also under discussion as acquired rights, or does this concept apply only to the salary conditions?

Advance educational planning is a critical aspect of family management and budgeting. This is even more the case where children with disabilities must be planned for and provided for.

UNWG would also welcome further information about the **transition measures** under consideration.

Education and tuition, transport expenses, school meals, field trips etc

The redefinition of the education allowance as a tuition and enrollment fees allowance was discussed in our letter 16/03/2015.

UNWG finds this redefinition extremely problematic and fundamentally unacceptable. We suggest no change to present reimbursement regulations, for the reasons discussed in our letter 16/03/2015.

Education in state schools in other countries comprehends many activities which in international schools in Rome are qualified as optional extras, to be billed separately, often organized by independent associations on school premises etc. Universities expect to see substantial evidence of non-academic interests and activities on application forms.

School transportation in Rome is expensive. International schools are generally located in high-rent zones of the city. The option of moving closer in to the school is not more economical for families. School meals in some schools are part of the socialization programme of the school, so no opt-out is possible even if the family should wish to economize by sending the child with a lunch-box. Field trips are part of educational programmes in most schools so no opt-out possible.

There is no room for families to engage in cost-cutting manoeuvres at this duty station.

The international schools in Rome:

These schools cater to a mixed international and local clientele. They offer international curricula and examinations. The fact that many different languages and cultures are represented can be regarded as enrichment.

However, a wide range of educational needs and options cannot be adequately covered by these local schools.

Provision for special educational needs is available in some but not in all and not for all disabilities.

Standards and quality of support cannot be compared with what is available in good state schools and in the private sector in some other countries. Provision and accommodations for disabilities in some international schools could be described as nominal.

In some countries, access to the best special needs schools in the private sector can be financed by local state education authorities if state schools in the area have insufficient or inadequate provision. In a model special school attended by the child of one of our members, a high percentage of pupils were fully funded by the state, including meals and transport services.

That child had found no school in Rome able and willing to support to the required standard. Many children with disabilities are well able to access an academic curriculum but require expert support in order to do so. Some are highly intelligent and highly disabled. Supporting equal access to the curriculum is a legal requirement in some countries and anchored in disability rights legislation.

Very **high-performing children** cannot always be accommodated by international schools. If they are to thrive, some children require **intensive or fast-track programmes** unavailable in Rome.

International schools face many challenges, such as recruiting and retaining highly qualified career teachers overseas, adjusting programmes to serve the complex needs of a student body comprising a high percentage of non-native speakers, etc. The full range of academic subjects available in the home countries will probably not be covered. Further, international schools are less able to invest in in-service training than national state school systems or home country private sector schools. Under these constraints, some international schools are doing a very good job. Some pupils gain entrance to top universities. But international schools are not comparable to competitive schools in other countries charging similar fees and should not be the only option available to expatriate families serving outside their home countries for the duration of their careers.

Other programmes unavailable in international schools:

Not only special needs or fast track: also **vocational, technical** and other.

Some children are disengaged academically, for a variety of reasons, but gifted technically. Perhaps they are brilliant mechanics who need a technical education and may later at some point return to an academic education as engineers. Perhaps they are IT experts or future professional chefs or hospitality managers. These children may thrive in the **technical education and vocational programmes** that start at 16 or younger, and such programmes will generally be found only in the home countries. Some youngsters should transfer to **art and design** colleges; there may be young musicians who need specialized **music** education, and so on.

Boarding will be involved in some form with all these options, either institutional or paying guest arrangements with local families.

Early years funding:

Our understanding is that, according to FICSA, the original rationale behind the 75% reimbursement of education allowance costs was that the UN system paid for four additional years of tertiary education, not then generally funded by foreign services, the private sector and other employers of expatriates.

The UN system was thus at that time funding approximately the equivalent of 100% of an education allowance of circa 12 years, which was then best practice in foreign services, multinationals private sector, etc.

However, foreign services, the military and other public and private sector employers of expatriates today increasingly fund early years child care for their employees, which includes up to five years pre-school. Pre-school is becoming a social norm in many countries, supporting both child development and employment of women, and these employers reflect this social trend in their expatriate allowance policies. The general trend with the above-mentioned employers appears to be that around 17 years of child care and schooling are reimbursed at 100%. (During home country postings of foreign service officials, expatriate allowances are naturally eliminated, so the average percentage reimbursed over a foreign service career will vary.)

Early years provision is a matter that concerns the social protection and welfare of the expatriate family.

Early years child care policies not only support the school readiness and socialization of children, but permit the accompanying spouse to seek employment opportunities if available or to improve qualifications for future employment.

In effect, the UN system today lags behind in the provision of assistance to expatriate families and in its treatment of their children, in this as in other areas.

Discussion should focus on this fact and on measures to enhance support and align with other employers of expatriate professionals, orientating towards best practice, rather than discussing further restrictions of education allowances that will weigh heavily on UN families and their children and significantly diminish the appeal of careers in the international civil service

Maternal leave:

UNWG agrees that 6 months is the minimum acceptable period for maternity leave, for all the well known and well established reasons.

Some countries offer far more generous conditions. Some also offer a paid period of leave followed by a far longer optional period without pay, after which the mother can return to her previous post.

Some countries also offer families the option of splitting leave between both parents; some incentivize paternal leave with bonuses.

Shonagh Mc Aulay (Family Chair, UNWG Rome)

Mariza Jurgens (President, UNWG Rome)

